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ABSTRACT

This document describes a project conducted to develop an approach to competency-based adult education (CBAE) for Montana adult basic education (ABE) programs. As effort continued on the project, a series of competencies related to adult student outcomes in the areas of reading, mathematics, and language arts were developed. The processes involved in developing the model for implementation included a literature review of CBAE research, a critique of the proposed process from educators outside the State of Montana, and a workshop session to involve practitioners from various settings throughout the state, out of which was derived the revised model and a listing of preliminary competencies. This document presents the preliminary model for CBAE in ABE classrooms. It also includes a partial list of competencies viewed as important by adult education practitioners and a proposal for statewide implementation of CBAE. Seventeen references are included. (KC)

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PLAN

FOR COMPETENCY BASED

ADULT EDUCATION (CBAE)

IN MONTANA

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Montana State University, July 1988

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INTRODUCTION

In January 1988 the Office of Public Instruction awarded Montana State University a grant to develop an approach to competency based adult education (CBAE) for Montana Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. The purpose of the project has been the development of a series of competencies related to adult student outcomes in the areas of reading, math and language arts.

The processes involved in developing the model for implementation included: a literature review to get a sense of what research and reports are saying about CBAE (see Appendix A for a bibliography); a critique of the proposed process from educators outside the State of Montana (see Appendix B); and a workshop session to involve practitioners from various settings throughout the state (see Appendix C for a list of participants) out of which was derived the revised model and a listing of preliminary competencies.

This document presents a preliminary model for Competency Based Adult Education (CBAE) in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) classroom; a partial list of competencies viewed as important by adult education practitioners; and a proposal for statewide implementation of CBAE.

COMPETENCY BASED ADULT EDUCATION MODEL

To implement CBAE into the classroom, several models were developed by the CBAE work session participants. The models developed by the participants are very similar to the model that was presented to them. The one exception was the increased availability and use of counseling. In fact, five of the seven models developed by the participants integrated more counseling. A revised model (based on the work session participants' feedback) is given in Figure 1.

The proposed model for classroom implementation of CBAE in ABE programs is broken into seven major steps. A continuous aspect of this model is the precise record-keeping that permeates the process. This helps the competency based program maintain its open-entry, open-exit existence, as well as providing for accountability within the program. Below is a step-by-step breakdown of the model in which a fictitious student named "Mary" is followed through the process.

STEP 1—Upon entering a program, a student receives professional counseling and completes student assessment processes. Mary is a twenty-eight year old women who feels the need to improve her computer skills in order to become more employable in today's world of work. She enters the program and talks with the counselor to establish career and personal objectives. After completing diagnostic tests, Mary is found to need improvement in the area of reading comprehension.

STEP 2—Learners needs and skills are established. Needs established for Mary through counseling and assessemnt are the improvement of reading skills, increased understanding of computers, and improvement of her self-esteem.

STEP 3a—Counseling and alternative educational approaches. Improving self-esteem is an important educational goal, but one that does not translate easily into competencies. To help Mary improve her self-esteem, more counseling is made available as well as participation in support groups. Mary also receives continuous feedback from the instructor concerning her progression in reading and computer skill development.

Step 3b—Competency areas established. This step is concerned with establishing the areas of competency development that are relevant to the life of the individual concerned. Mary, for example, is concerned with learning computer and reading skills to become more employable. Therefore, the competency area established for Mary is Occupational Knowledge.

STEP 4—Specific competencies determined and instructional activities agreed upon. Mary and the instructor now derive a set of specific competencies that fit Mary's needs and desired skills. The competencies, along with the instructional activities and demonstrable post-assessment activities, are included in a contractual agreement between Mary and the instructor.

STEP 5—Instructional activities take place. Mary now goes through the instructional activities as described in the contract. The instructor provides the materials and provides Mary with continuous feedback on her progress.

STEP 6—Competency post-assessement and counseling. Competency is demonstrated via the method agreed upon in Mary's contract. She is again offered counseling to reassess her goals and needs for future endeavors.

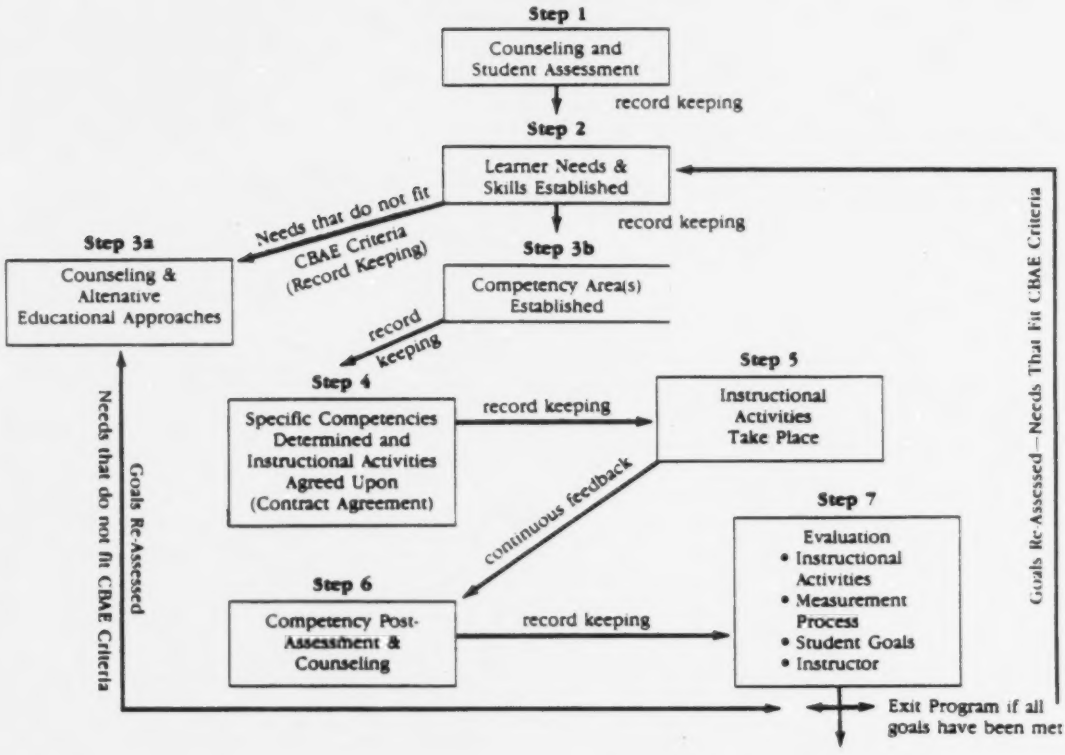
STEP 7—Evaluation. All levels of involvement now enter the process. Mary is given the opportunity to evaluate the activities, the measurement process, the instructor and herself. The instructor also evaluates all the phases listed above, and the supervisor is given this opportunity as well.

Mary now decides whether all her goals have been met or if she has acquired some new goals. She may choose to reenter the process with reestablishment of her needs and skills (Step 2) or to use alternative educational approaches to help her meet a need. If Mary decides that her needs have been met and feels confident about her skills, she may leave the program to search for employment.

The example of Mary is used to present the model from a learner's role. Each learner entering a program is an individual and this model is such that an individual's needs can be uniquely met.

It can be seen that some learner needs such as Mary's need for self-esteem, did not mesh with the establishment of competencies. Another example of a need that is important to specific individuals, but would be very difficult to quantify via demonstrable competency statements is the ability to live and work in a multicultural setting. These and other affective needs would be better dealt with through alternative approaches.

Figure 1
Classroom CBAE Model



COMPETENCY STATEMENTS

The competency statements generated by the adult education practitioners at the work session were generally focused on the life skill areas of occupational knowledge and economic resources. This emphasis was consistent with the literature reviewed. CBAE focuses most commonly on learner occupational and economic needs.

The practitioners involved in the initial competency identification were from various adult education settings from throughout the State of Montana. Settings included Adult Basic Education centers, vocational technical centers, a state prison education center, a Native American reservation ABE program and federally funded employment retraining centers. These competencies are meant as *examples* of what practitioners felt important in their settings. Actual competencies used in a statewide curriculum would be devised by a broad representation of teachers, tailored to specific settings and individuals, and would be part of a larger adult basic education curriculum. Many of the statements were similar even though practitioners came from different settings. Some of the competencies that follow are stated broadly, rather than in the specific form necessary for instruction.

Occupational Knowledge

Reading

- read and understand labor market information (i.e. newspapers, job announcements, other related job bulletins)
- increase reading speed and comprehension for training manuals, labor contracts, safety manuals, etc.
- read and recognize job descriptions which fit with a student's interests and abilities
- recognize common words used on the job or in a specific field of interest to student
- read and understand job application forms
- correctly interpret information contained in charts and graphs for on-the-job usage

Writing

- correctly complete various application forms
- complete a resume with all pertinent information regarding employment and education history and personal data
- complete an effective letter of application and understand the process necessary to gear each letter of application to specific jobs

Computation
- correctly approximate wages and reductions from paychecks
- demonstrate ability to calculate areas and determine costs of materials for building projects
- determine volumes of various types of containers
- compute hours and wages from a time sheet to achieve gross pay calucalations

Verbal and Listening Skills
- demonstrate effective interview techniques and procedures
- express wants and needs assertively
- analyze a video of personal simulated job interview—understand the basic requirements for entry into the labor market
- demonstrate an ability to use networking as a method for identifying job openings

Other
- operate a computer by turning on, putting in disk, following basic instructions on the disk, escaping from an unwanted program, booting up a new program, removing disk, proper storage and turning off the computer
- identify behaviors, skills, work habits and education that will secure employment, maintain employment, or receive a promotion

Affective

(A teacher and a learner may be able to translate these skills into specific competency statements.)
- demonstrate persistence in looking for employment
- demonstrate good work habits and responsibility (e.g. good attendance, follow and complete assignments, follow directions)
- assess own strengths and weaknesses for job types

Consumer Economics

Reading
- use newspapers or other printed information to find housing
- understand procedures to open a bank account
- use newspapers as a source of product information
- read directions and information on household product labels
- understand the charts and graphs found in newspapers or magazines
- collect printed information concerning types of automobile insurance or homeowner insurance and make best selection for personal/family needs
- understand where and how to obtain utilities information for housing
- understand product descriptions in catalogues
- understand and demonstrate ability to read a dinner menu
- demonstrate ability to read maps and understand scales
- identify various sections of a newspaper
- read directions on medicine labels, recipes and appliance manuals
- read grocery ads for comparison shopping
- understand rules of alphabetizing and demonstrate successful usage of telephone directory and dictionary

Writing
- complete forms to open bank accounts
- complete forms to apply for credit
- write a business letter of complaint or request
- correctly complete a check for payment

Computation
- set a budget based on current wages and expenses
- maintain a balanced checking or savings account
- figure area of rooms for household maintenance and repair
- figure mileage and needed gasoline amount for trips to calculate expenses
- figure interest expense of loans
- calculate expenses of home and automobile ownership
- determine volumes of various containers
- compute price per pound for various commodities
- demonstrate a functional understanding of various taxes (i.e. sales, income, social security, property)
- count and convert coins and currency and apply to everyday tasks
- develop an understanding of decimals and use in daily experiences
- figure price based on cost, weight charges and freight charge of a catalogue order
- calculate mileage of various routes for travel using a distance scale and choose best route available
- be able to apply information from grocery ads to do comparison shopping
- calculate discounts based on percentages
- make change from purchases in coins and currency

Community Resources

Reading
- identify and look up in telephone directory appropriate social service agencies
- demonstrate an understanding of bus, airline, train, or other schedules

Communication
- make contact with and set appointment with a social service agency

Affective
- be able to live and work in a multicultural setting

Government and Law

Reading
- demonstrate an understanding of the discrimination laws

Academics

Reading
- increase reading speed and comprehension for success in educational endeavors
- understand entry level college and vo-tech course descriptions

Writing
- write a short essay that would pass the GED requirement
- demonstrate an understanding of writing mechanics to pass the GED

Computation
- develop math skills for entry level college courses
- develop math skills to pass the GED

CBAE STATEWIDE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

To implement CBAE statewide would require several steps. In CBAE, management, counseling and instruction are key program components that need to be integrated and employees of each component must work closely with the others to ensure CBAE is a successful method. The State of Washington and the State of Connecticut are in the beginning stages of implementation of a statewide CBAE approach for ABE programs.

Washington and Connecticut have identified several sequential phases of implementation, including competency identification, model classroom curriculum development, assessment and record-keeping development, and statewide implementation training. Following are several components of each phase of competency based adult education development gleaned from these pilot programs. These are presented here to provide a framework to help identify the components needed in Montana to help ensure the success of CBAE in ABE programs.

I. Compentency Identification
- A. Identify product
- B. Choose members of competency identification team
- C. Questionnaire sent to ABE teachers and others to identify specific site needs
- D. Development of competencies
- E. Competencies revised and adopted

II. CBAE Classroom Curriculum Development
- A. Identification of curriculum model (activities accompanying CBAE)
- B. Developers hired
- C. Curriculum developed
- D. Curriculum field treated
- E. Revision of curriculum model

III. Assessment and Record-keeping
- A. Selection of assessment instruments
- B. Design reporting system or program evaluations
- C. Development of certification of student achievement
- D. Pilot system

IV. Statewide CBAE Implementation Training
- A. Develop training design
- B. Hire Trainers
- C. Training of staff in program sites

The development of CBAE for ABE programs in Montana has thus far initiated selection of a competency identification team, developed a partial listing of competencies perceived as important to the members of the team in relation to their various settings, and proposed a model of classroom implementation of CBAE.

SUMMARY

Using this model of competency based adult education for ABE classes, a student can go through the process from needs identification to demonstrate competence based on his or her needs. The model provides for counseling opportunities along the way to make sure that curriculum is responding to these needs.

Implementation of CBAE in Montana will require a commitment to a number of steps throughout the State: discovery of which competencies are important to adults in Montana; development of a classroom curriculum which respects learner needs and produces measurable outcomes; and the training which will be necessary to insure that teachers throughout the state understand and support CBAE concepts. These steps will require the efforts of ABE teachers from diverse settings as well as state administrators and university professionals.

Appendix A

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Appendix B

EXPERTS IN COMPETENCY BASED ADULT EDUCATION WHO REVIEWED PROPOSED MODEL

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Appendix C

PARTICIPANTS IN WORK SESSION TO REVIEW MODEL AND DEVELOP COMPETENCIES

(Appendix C deleted by author)